

Valley needs more water storage

By Rep. Devin Nunes
Commentary
Visalia Times-Delta

The pirates who sailed the high seas had a song with a line that went, "Water, water everywhere but not a drop to drink." Of course, they were referring to the briny sea-water that was unsuitable for consumption.

As we dry out from the wettest March in seven years, we could modify the old mariner's song to read: "Water, water everywhere but not a place to put it."

This winter season we've been deluged with rain here in the San Joaquin Valley, and while common sense tells you that these downpours should mean lots of extra water for homes, the environment and agriculture, that's unfortunately not the case.

Any "extra" water we get in the Central Valley during a rainy season is lost to us because we have no way of capturing the additional runoff to save for another day. This "extra" water simply runs down the river beyond the reach of our wells

and valuable crop lands.

Runoff forecasts already show that as much as 1.6 million acre-feet of water will pass down the San Joaquin River this season.

That's a lot of water, but Friant Dam at Millerton Lake can only hold 520,000 acre-feet at a time. So, the Bureau of Reclamation has already begun releasing water that can't be stored.

The simple solution to this dilemma we face is to build another dam upstream from Millerton Lake. The Bureau of Reclamation is already studying this option and I am doing what I can as a member of Congress to make sure the agency's efforts are supported politically and financially until the job is done.

We simply cannot believe that our booming population and vibrant agricultural industry can continue to survive with such a limited water supply. The problem will only get worse over time as we deplete our groundwater supply and fail to develop the infrastructure needed to replenish it.

I'm always wary when

someone says they've got a win-win solution to a problem, but I honestly think there is a win-win solution in this case. At the start of my first term I introduced legislation calling for a dam on the upper San Joaquin River and have fought for the necessary funding to study the project since that time. The dam would allow us to capture surplus rain and snow pack runoff in wet years to supplement the supply during dry years for cities served by the watershed, as well as agricultural users.

The additional storage capability would also allow us to regulate the flow from the downstream Friant Dam, thereby truly restoring the San Joaquin River, its habitat and fisheries.

We must unite as a region in support of this important project. No new water projects have been built in the Central Valley in more than a generation. If we want to ensure the health and prosperity of future generations, we must speak with a single voice in support of a new dam on the San Joaquin River now.

